

Peak District National Park Authority – Meet the CEO Event Community Issues Feedback

Venue: Castleton, Blueberry Café (Castleton Visitor Centre)

Date: 14 February 2024

NPA – National Park Authority

Please be aware feedback briefings will not include information on personal, individual or private business queries or specific planning applications (unless of wider community interest).

The following responses are based on questions raised at the above meeting with Peak District National Park chief executive, Phil Mulligan. This briefing note responds to the most frequently raised issues and isn't intended to cover all questions raised.

Monitoring and action on unauthorised development (planning service)

The NPA has recently invested significantly in our enforcement team with a number of previously vacant posts now active again and additional new resource. We do however, have a backlog of cases which is now being addressed with this improved capacity. Priority will remain, for example, with cases where previous enforcement notices have been issued or instances where wildlife, habitats or other property or cultural heritage may be at risk of significant or irreparable damage. We continue to encourage the public to report potential breaches of planning legislation and all cases will be triaged and assessed on the basis of the above criteria and more.

Campervan use in the Hope Valley

We are aware that the increasing use of motorised campervans for overnight or prolonged stays in the area is a cause for concern among some residents. The NPA itself does not have a highways jurisdiction and therefore has limited individual or traffic management enforcement powers. These issues have already been raised with both the police and county council and any further action such as road closures, regulation orders or other highway management would be a matter for multi-stakeholder consultation, including the NPA. Where our rangers have an opportunity to engage with campervan owners, we inform them of the good practice and responsible behaviours expected and alternatives available in the area. It should be noted that in some cases, the status of a campervan and its location may be legal and legitimate. The NPA backs campervan use which is respectful of local communities including owners taking an active role in supporting the economy of the area where personal circumstances allow. Unlawful activity will always be reported to the relevant enforcing body by officers from the NPA, including the police where necessary.

The NPA recognises that the planning and development process may have a role to play in either temporary or long-term solutions to capacity for large volumes of campervans in specific communities, and any such application(s) will be assessed on the case-by-case basis of existing policy and where it may provide a pragmatic alternative to highway use.

A new permitted right has been introduced which allows for pop up campsites. The permitted development right allows for the temporary use of land as a recreational campsite for up to 60 days per calendar year without requiring full planning permission.

Previously, the limit for pop-up campsites has been 28 days – except during 2020 and 2021 when the government extended this to 56 days.

However, campaigners had been lobbying for a permanent increase in the limit, arguing that putting in place the necessary infrastructure for a 28-day season is often not financially viable. The new right, which took effect from 26 July 2023, allows for sites to accommodate up to 50 tents, motorhomes or campervans.

The Authority is currently monitoring the take up of this new provision and is considering whether there is strong evidence to apply a legal exemption called an article 4 direction. This would remove the permitted development in a specified area and require landowners to seek full planning permission.

Castleton Village Survey

The NPA and chief executive welcome the findings of the Castleton Village Survey, however individual concerns highlighted are too exhaustive to cover in this briefing note (with the exception of issues already referred to in other sections). A number of these are also civic/parish or county council matters for which the NPA has no specific powers.

The NPA is aware of the proposals for a 'Castleton Code' regarding responsible visitor actions. During 2024, the NPA expects to convene a wide stakeholder group to assess the campaign known as 'Peak District Proud', which was formerly initiated in 2020, but was ultimately subdued in its delivery by the impacts of Covid-19 restrictions and lockdowns. We also recognise the visitor landscape has changed during this intervening period and therefore refreshed or alternative approaches may be needed. The NPA will engage with parish representatives in this process, once underway. We believe that a consistent, well-adopted and amplified code of conduct across the whole National Park has the potential to be more effective than specific, local village or location 'codes' that could lead to confusion among visitors. This was also the original approach behind #PeakDistrictProud and one of the core aspects of it we would like to see continued.

The NPA is also exploring new 'hub' approaches to partnership working, data insights and aspects such as sustainable transport in areas of particularly high visitor footfall. If this hub-based option proves beneficial in initial pilot areas it could be rolled out in additional locations such as Castleton. This work is not related to tourism promotion of the region.

Sustainable transport

The National Park Authority itself is not a transport provider nor a designated transport authority, with these roles typically undertaken by the private sector, commercial and local authorities in the region. We do however, work with a range of local partners to support pilot projects and initiatives to encourage sustainable and active travel. The NPA has also previously hosted a regional sustainable transport symposium. In 2023, the NPA welcome a dedicated sustainable transport officer to our policy team.

We are already working with Hope Valley Climate Action (HVCA) and they have recently received additional funding. Any new services at this time are likely to come through either the County Council or commercial operators. The Authority doesn't have a specific budget for a new Hope Valley Explorer pilot service. Working with partners, there may be opportunities for new upgraded active travel routes, but there is an embargo on a possible funding source for this.

Castleton Visitor Centre and visitor information provision

An independent and in-depth consultative analysis is currently underway seeking to propose solutions to how face-to-face visitor information can be maintained at Castleton (and other relevant locations) whilst ensuring such services are also financially viable. The NPA also recognises that access to information has also changed markedly in recent years due to the use of mobile devices and online sites. A summary of this analysis – excluding any commercially sensitive data – will be made available once completed and assessed by the NPA and Members.

Flooding at residential properties

The NPA is aware of concerns from some residents regarding the impacts of increased instances of flooding and how planning and development policies can potentially help mitigate this, for example through the construction of walls.

For private dwellings there are permitted development rights which allow residents to build new walls or alter existing walls without the need for planning permission.

This is subject to the walls not being over 1 metre (height) where adjacent to a highway used by vehicular traffic, or 2 metres elsewhere, otherwise planning permission is required. In these permitted development cases the Authority cannot specify choice of materials or appearance but would encourage the use of natural local limestone as found within many villages (such as Castleton) laid to appear outwardly as a drystone wall (even though internally it is mortared or water-proofed in some way).

Residents should also be aware of Conservation Area restrictions and controls, in particular regarding demolition of existing structures. Whilst permitted development rights may allow the demolition of unlisted walls in some circumstances, we strongly recommend contacting the Authority's planning enquiry service before undertaking any works. Most walls providing flood resilience are likely to fall outside of permitted development and therefore planning permission would be required.

The Authority is not a Housing Provider so has to work with the District Councils and Housing Associations to understand local housing needs and search for good sites for new homes. Policies allow for this in places like Castleton and Hope. NPA officers are happy to help local communities organise new housing needs surveys to give the evidence needed for new housing.

The review of the local plan is looking to find ways to assist future delivery of affordable homes and communities are encouraged to get involved and respond to the next consultation into issues and options for future policy later this year.

Pre-application planning advice

Following a temporary closure of the service, a fee-paying pre-application advice service is now available once again: <https://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/planning/advice/pre-application-advice>

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